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**INCLUSION IN AN EXCLUSIVE WORLD**

**by**

**Dr. Barbara Top**

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# **INCLUSION IN AN EXCLUSIVE WORLD**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the field of special education, the recent trend is to explore the concept of inclusion of all elementary and secondary students with special needs in the general education classrooms and/or programs. Public Law 94-142, signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1975, mandated that all students be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). During the late eighties and into the nineties lawmakers, parents, educators, and the courts were interpreting LRE to mean that students should be educated in the general classroom. It is surprising to many people today that the term, inclusion, is not used in Public Law 94-142.

How does the inclusion concept interface with the Christian faith and the education of students at Northwestern College in the Teacher Education Program? I intend to explore the answer to that question in this writing. This paper will focus on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of inclusion as interpreted by myself. I will take into account writings and research by both secular and non-secular authors as well as examine various passages of Scripture as they relate to the inclusion concept. Inclusion will be addressed in broader terms than just the debate about separate special education and general education programs. I will examine more fully how it relates to all of life as viewed by the Christian.

## **INCLUSION AS DEBATED BY THE EXPERTS**

### **Catalysts or Encrusted Residue?**

Jack Pearpoint in an article in Inclusion News (1990) indicates that our society has reached a turning point where we must make decisions about values and direction in

education as well as in all of life. Pierpoint states that we can no longer have the luxury of just buying a piece of all solutions as we discuss educational theories and practices. We have to answer the harder questions. What do we believe in? What kind of future do we want for our children's education especially as it relates to students with special needs, and how do we get there? Pierpoint identifies two opposing trends or two waging factions discussed today, namely inclusion and exclusion. He proposes that this dilemma is broader than schooling and education. The debate, as he sees it, is between people who believe in exclusivity and those who believe in inclusion. He defines inclusion as an egalitarian opportunity and the predominant value. Exclusivity is defined as giving more value and opportunity to those who are considered to be more highly gifted.

Pearpoint believes that inclusive options where all are welcome will utilize the talents of people who would be discarded and written off in the exclusion model.

Pierpoint's underlying assumptions of exclusivity or exclusion are

- a) we are not all equal in capacity or value
- b) it is not feasible to give equal opportunity
- c) we must choose and train an elite who will take care of the rest,
- d) the excluded will benefit through the trickle-down theory.

On the other hand, the assumptions of inclusion that he espouses are

- a) we are equal in value; however, each has unique capacity
- b) all people can learn
- c) all people have contributions to make, and
- d) we have a responsibility and an opportunity to give every person the chance to make a contribution.



He concludes his definition of inclusion by indicating that the criterion for inclusion is breathing, not IQ, income, color, race, sex, or language.

The choice is ours, states Pearpoint. We have the power to listen to voices that are seldom heard. If we take the time, learn to listen, and struggle with the pain and frustration that disempowered people feel, we will see new visions, feel new energy, and find hope in our future. There is power in the powerless. We can be "catalysts or encrusted residue." I feel that our society has much to learn by listening to and observing those who are considered to be special or disabled. Examples that have come to the forefront in the world just recently are the works of Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa saw worth in the poor and the dying and offered compassion and care to them. She saw them as having worth. She took in the destitute dying and infants abandoned in trash heaps, soothed the ulcers of lepers and helped the insane (Sioux City Journal, September 6, 1997, p 1). We as a society and as Christians have much to offer to transform thinking in our culture about the worth of all people. We can be the catalysts for change. There is no need for us to be accepting of the present when the downtrodden are scorned. Let us not be the encrusted residue but instead go out and remove the crust and let us shine up our thinking and acceptance of all of God's created beings.

### **Educate the Best and Take Care of the Rest?**

Dr. William Stainback and Dr. Susan Stainback, formerly professors at the University of Northern Iowa, are championing the movement of full inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom. They base their rationale for full inclusion on history. In their book (Stainback, Stainback, and Forest, 1989, p. 3) they quote Chief

Justice Earl Warren regarding the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*:

Separateness in education can generate a feeling of inferiority as to children's status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone. This sense of inferiority...affects the motivation to learn and has a tendency to retard...educational and mental development.

The Stainbacks give as their rationale for inclusion that "it is simply the morally and ethically right thing to do" (Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989, p. 3). Inclusion is a value judgment. There are two roads – inclusion and exclusion. Advocates for the exclusion route advocate for elitism according to the Stainbacks and Pierpoint. The philosophy of the exclusionists, they declare, is to "educate the best and take care of the rest." Exclusionists accept the validity of a permanent "underclass" in our society (Stainback and Stainback, 1992). Instead of looking at students in an exclusionary way, inclusionists, such as the Stainbacks, Pierpoint, Forest, Gartner, and Lipsky, promote the philosophy that all students belong and can learn in the mainstream of school and community life. Diversity is valued and strengthens those who come in contact with individuals with disabilities by providing greater opportunities for learning.

Stainback and Stainback in their 1992 book indicate that there are four questions society needs to ask itself: a) what do we as a society really value? b) what kind of world do we want our children to live in? c) are we willing to invest resources to prevent illiteracy, poverty, segregation, and pain? And d) are we willing to create a just society for all?



Walter Lippman, more than half a century ago, said that if a child fails in school and then fails in life, the school cannot sit back and say; you see how accurately I predicted this. Unless we are to admit that education is essentially impotent we have to throw back this child's failure at the school and describe it as a failure not by the child but by the school (Block and Dworkin, Eds, 1976, p. 17).

The process of inclusion begins when students, parents, and teachers develop a vision of the classroom as an inclusive community where everyone belongs, where the needs of all members are met, and where people care about and support each other (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Students are more productive when they are respected, interested in what they do, see the purpose of the learning, understand the relationship of the part to the whole, have some control over the pace and timing of the work and have cooperative relationships with fellow workers (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). When true inclusion occurs, students can learn about mutual respect, being caring, and being supportive in an integrated society. Being accepted, welcome, and secure in the learning setting with peers is considered prerequisite to the success of students (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). It is more than educate the best and take care of the rest!

Tom Bellamy, in Journal of Teacher Education (1994) asserts that the inclusion-exclusion issue is conversation that occurs on several levels. There is the moral conversation about the responsibility of a just and caring society for its diverse children; a political conversation about the commitments that our society is willing to make to fulfill its moral responsibility, given the many worthy causes that require scarce resources; a policy conversation about the government programs and requirements that are likely to achieve our moral and political goals; an administrative conversation about the delivery

systems that will best achieve policy goals given the current state of knowledge and practice; and a programming conversation about the kind of interactions among student, teachers, parents, peers, and content.

Patricia Renick in National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal (1994-95) argues that her stance for inclusion is developed from a feminist ethical viewpoint of caring and community. In this perspective, she argues that inclusion of handicapped/disabled students in regular classes is appropriate educational policy for all children. Inclusion will promote appropriate educational programs and pedagogy for all students regardless of handicapping conditions. She asserts that no child benefits from incarceration or exclusion from the mainstream of society.

According to Mercer (1973) it would appear that special classes have become the dumping ground for all sorts of differences in children. Renick quotes C.S. Lewis who in 1977 stated that "there is a deeper magic at work within the universe." There is more to a thing than just stating it is the law. Renick states that the inclusion of all learners regardless of their learning capacity included into the common experiences of the classroom must be argued from all ethical perspectives. In her article, Renick quotes Purpel (1989) who illuminates the current educational predicament:

Our culture's insistence on competition, individual success, and privatism is reflected in a school program which puts cultural consideration of achievement, order, control, and hierarchy over educational values.

For children who possess inherent disabilities, inclusion in a competitive, hierarchical and controlling school setting is an invitation for continued exile. This competitive community acts to exile regular students. The "deeper magic" needed is



community and curriculums reflecting a caring ethic for all students. Schools must be redesigned as havens in the community. Within these havens the education imperative must be a mutual confirmation for the realization of individual potentiality. Within this mutual confirmation, both teacher and student are fully present, fully aware of each other's presence without regard or reservation. This confirmation is granted as a result of being.

B. Den Ouden in A Symposium of Ethics (1982) states that we interpret ourselves and come to know ourselves. Our interpretation of who and what we are and what we value as individuals occurs within the community. Renick, in the conclusion of her article, states that if we continue to divide and exile children, we will not develop a community of caring. In the inclusive classroom, the diverse needs of all children are accommodated to the maximum extent possible in the general education environment. They are not divided or exiled.

The article, "Inclusive Communities Support Effective Conflict Resolution" in the fall, 1994 issue of Topics in Inclusive Education addresses inclusive communities. Buzzwords in education today address community and inclusion. It is to be understood that just placing a student in the general education arena does not necessarily guarantee a sense of community for the person involved. Sheldon Berman (1990) defines community as a group of people who acknowledge their common purpose, respect their differences, share in group decision-making as well as in responsibility for the actions of the group, and support each other's growth. In order for successful inclusion to then occur, there must be an acknowledging of the members' connection and commonalities, there must be an experience of belonging, a respect of differences, a time to develop relationships,

shared responsibility for decision-making, and a common purpose or shared vision (Montie and Vandercook, 1993).

After reflecting on the numerous authorities who advocate for the inclusive approach to educating persons with special needs, the reader gains a perspective of inclusion from several angles. Pierpoint stresses values and direction. The Stainbacks use history to indicate that inclusion is morally and ethically the right thing to do. Bellamy attacks the issue from many angles: moral, political, administrative, and programming aspects of inclusion. Coming from an ethical, feminist point of view, Renick states that incarceration or exclusion from the mainstream is not of benefit to the child.

### **But Not All Agree**

Dr. Douglas Fuchs and Dr. Lynn Fuchs, professors at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, have authored several articles addressing inclusion. Taylor (1994) noted that the Fuchs' view themselves as pragmatists and their opponents as idealists who have not thoroughly researched the best needs of all students with disabilities. "Extremist, strident, radical, insular, exclusionary, and zealous" are words used by the Fuchs' to describe the full-inclusion camp (Taylor, p. 301). The Fuchs indicated that their opponents are more idealistic than pragmatic, more prone toward advocacy than analysis (Lloyd, Singh, and Repp 1991). The Fuchs' call the full inclusionists such as the Stainbacks abolitionists and consider themselves as conservationists. The idea of abolitionism was that they are more idealistic than pragmatic and more prone toward advocacy than analysis. They want to destroy all of special education. The abolitionists are also uncritical and non-empirical when looking at general education. The Fuchs' feel there are many positive points to



current special education programs that suggest it could adequately serve students in need of special education.

Conservationists, such as the Fuchs', indicate that the inclusionists do not have a good understanding of special education. The Fuchs' defend special education against the type of categorical condemnation made by inclusionists, Gartner and Lipsky. The Fuchs' recognize that separate instruction is sometimes necessary, seeing the need for reform, but agreeing that the necessary modifications can occur within a framework of realities and protections for children with disabilities.

While there is much disagreement between the two camps of experts, there is still common ground (Lloyd, et al., 1991). Both groups have experienced dissatisfaction over the infrequency of the mainstreaming of students with disabilities. Both groups decry testing and labeling practices that are not specifically related to instruction. There is a need for restructuring in special education and educators need to be more accountable for student outcomes.

The Fuchs' declare that just because there are problems in many places, special education is not broken everywhere (Fuchs, 1994, p. 303). Indeed, changes need to be made, but not merely for the sake of change.

It is my philosophy that services for students with special needs should be offered in an inclusive setting. It does not necessarily mean the services need to be in the general classroom. The philosophy of the school district or building should be such so that all administration, teachers, and staff see a need and a responsibility for the education and welfare of all the students in their district. They would see the school and community as environments where all are seen as equal in value, each has unique capacity, all can make

contributions, and as educators and citizens must give all the opportunity to make contributions. Their acceptance of each student as a whole, worthwhile human being is essential and the student should be adequately educated using the talents and abilities the student possesses.

### **Do the Courts have the Last Word?**

What do the courts of the land have to say about inclusion in the schools? First of all, the special education laws passed in this country do not mention inclusion. The least restrictive environment (LRE) is the terminology used in Public Law 94-142, The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, passed in 1975. Succeeding laws continue to use LRE terminology. Many litigative acts in education address special education programs and services. Following are brief descriptions of a few cases that address LRE and inclusion. The federal offices in Washington, D.C. in their interpretation of special education legislation and law also produce mandates that schools need to follow.

The following references to court cases and legislation are taken from a paper entitled, *Selected Issues in Special Education*, by Larry Bartlett (1996).

In *Doe v. Withers* (1993), a West Virginia jury awarded compensatory and punitive damages against a teacher who refused to accommodate for a student's disability in the regular classroom. The teacher refused to provide oral testing which had been ordered in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The teacher had belittled and insulted the boy in class and he failed the first semester in history, passing all other classes.

Modifications and adaptations necessary to facilitate the placement of a student in the general classroom must be placed in the IEP and must then be provided to the student



(OSER, 1993). The Office of Special Education Programs (1995) has ruled that regular class teachers must be informed about IEP content. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has ruled that failure to inform general education teachers of the needs of students with special needs and failure to open channels of communication between general and special educators violated Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (OCR, 1985).

Decisions on inclusion must be based on the individual student, and placement may not be based on generalizations such as Intelligence Quotient (IQ) (OSWEA, 1992). Supplementary aids and services could include modification to the regular class curriculum. The lack of adequate personnel does not relieve a district of its responsibilities (OSEP, 1995).

Courts and government offices have also indicated that a student does not have to be in an inclusive classroom to be in the LRE. In the M.D. Tenn. (1995) case, a fourteen year old with a severe mental disability had been included in a regular class and this was proven not to be of greater benefit than a self-contained class with mainstreaming only for lunch, recess, art, and music. This proved to be less restrictive for this particular student.

A Michigan case (E.D. Mich, 1995) had a similar result. A fourteen year old was placed in a seventh grade classroom with an aide, but worked in isolation with the aide and was completely dependent upon the aide who instructed the student at the first or second grade level. The court concluded that no amount of supplementary aids and services could meet the student's needs in the general class setting.

I think it would be clear to the reader of this paper that full inclusion is not just a practice that needs to be exercised and considered. It is more than that. The philosophy of an inclusive approach to the student is part of the responsibility of the entire school system, a generalization that can be made, in my opinion.

### **INCLUSION AND THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

In a paper entitled "Biblical Studies and Our Curriculum", Ary DeMoor writes about biblical norms for our world and our life. Biblical norms for our world and our life must acknowledge the Creator and maintainer of all which includes persons with special needs. DeMoor maintains that all knowledge is world and life knowledge – a personal acknowledging of our Father's World. There needs to be an emphasis on the unity and the oneness of life. This includes test tubes, stars, grammar rules, mathematical laws as examples. Also included are all individuals included in the general education programs.

According to DeMoor, learning is meaningful only if the wholeness of life and the unity of creation become clear to the student despite the diversity of knowledge that confronts him/her from day to day. A subject may never be taught in and for itself, it must be shown to relate to all aspects of God's many-sided creation and the student needs to be able to grasp the place of the subject within the structure of knowledge and society. All topics that are taught must in some way contribute to the student's understanding of how people must live and work responsibly before the Lord. The student needs to function as a responsible image bearer.

Continuing with DeMoor's ideas, a teacher needs to give guidance and direction to a student, but the teacher needs to respect the student as a unique individual with



his/her own abilities, views, and insights. Much can be said about people as image bearers of God, but the most basic idea is that we have a heart. Humans have the inevitable task of making a heart commitment to either the true or a false God. We then respond either obediently or disobediently to God. The human's heart commitment is his/her religion. The only way we can respond obediently is through Christ who serves as the bridge to God. This is what makes Christ so central in a world and life view. It is only through Him that we can make a proper response to God's Word.

Psalm 19:14 gives indication of our words and meditations: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight." Psalm 147 is a good example of the perspective of a person who sees the wonders of God's good Creation and duly commits his heart to God on the basis of what is seen in Creation. In Colossians 1:15-20 Paul says: "Out of the heart flows all issues of life". All of the relationships which a person has in the totality of his/her life experiences which include church, family, school, business, and community, are affected by his/her heart commitment and affect that heart commitment. All things hold together in Jesus Christ and all things are to be brought into subjection to Him.

When addressing the issue of inclusion, and taking into account the heart commitment of the Christian, one then must take into account four questions: a) what are the norms for Life? b) how do we respond to God's Word? c) what is the present situation in which we live? And d) having heard how things ought to be and how they actually are, what alternatives have we to offer our society and culture? People live in four basic relationships: to God, to themselves, to others, and to society and culture.

How then, keeping these premises in mind, do we interact with and educate the person who is considered by our society to have a disability? I Corinthians 12 gives insight into the diversity of persons. Verse 4 states that we have the same spirit, the same Lord, same God – reflecting the trinity – a diversity and unity of spiritual gifts. Verse 7 indicates that we all have a gift, the evidence of the Spirit's working in our life. All persons are intended to build up the Christian community. Verse 13 attests that in Christ there is no racial or cultural distinction. There is no social distinction. Are some members of society better or less important than others? Verse 22 states that on the contrary, those parts of the body of Christ that seem to be weaker are indispensable and the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. According to verses 25 and 26, there should be no division in the body but its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it and is also honored the same.

If we are walking humbly with God, we cannot be carrying superior feelings towards others, according to Dennis De Haan (1997) in his interpretation of Micah 6. W. R. Brookman (1997) in addressing this same verse, indicates that being made in the image of God requires us to follow the mandate in Micah 6:8--To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. The verse relates to us what God requires of us. We do not need to come before God with burnt offerings or wealth or important positions to be in His image but only to walk humbly. This verse, in my opinion, helps us to see how we should treat all people, including those with disabilities.

In Scripture and in our society and culture, we do view some as weaker, some as stronger. Does Scripture address this issue? Isaiah 42:3 and Matthew 12:20 declare that a bruised reed He will not break and a smoldering wick, He will not snuff out. In



faithfulness, he will bring forth justice. Psalm 72:2,4 states that he will judge the afflicted ones with justice. He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy.

Then, those who are viewed as stronger are commanded, according to St. Paul in Romans 15 to bear with the feelings of the weak. We need to accept one another, then just as Christ accepted all, in order to bring praise to God. Paul saw himself as an instrument in the hands of Christ and Christ was to do with him as he ought. This has implications for all of education imparted by the Christian: instruments to be played to make for a smooth and harmonious song on this earth and practicing for the life to come.

The Servant of the Lord then reviews history from the viewpoint of the broken, what some would consider the losers. Worldly empires, in an attempt to maintain power, close down history to any real newness. But Isaiah proclaims that the former things have taken place, and new things I declare. While the empire (worldly view) views history from the perspectives of the powerful victors, the Servant of the Lord rejects such heroic bravado. S/He looks at history from the viewpoint of the losers. The Servant of the Lord replaces the brutality of the empire with the gentleness and grace of his kingdom. The servant understands history from the perspective of pain. From a biblical perspective, history is reopened and new possibilities emerge when bruised reeds and dimly burned wicks are not disposed of but embraced as central to the purpose of history. According to Isaiah 42:5, It is God who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it.

Dr. Brian Walsh (1997) in an article in The Banner states that the sovereign creator God embraces his creation with a loving intimacy. This creation included the bruised reeds and dimly lit wicks. Edwin Walhout in an article, "Our Theology: Where do we go from here?" (Banner, 1997) declares that there are some questions we need to ask ourselves – a) toward what goal is God directing the world he created? b) what effect has the gospel had on the development of western civilizations? We then ask ourselves, what part do we play in our treatment of people and are we further developing God's world and how does this affect our culture and our community. Does this give direction as to how we educate our children, children with varying disabilities?

Going back, then, to the examples of Christ in His relationships with the weak and the ill while He was on earth and the example of Mother Teresa in her work with the dying, outcast, and abandoned, we as a society, culture, and community have the responsibility to provide, educate, care for and include those persons who are considered to have disabilities. Maybe they are here to glorify God just as Christ said of the blind man He healed.

#### **WHAT THEN DO WE DO AT NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE**

Harold C. Howard (1993) in a paper entitled *Christian Higher Education at the Crossroads: What Difference Does it Make?* challenges us in Christian higher education to develop leaders who will impact the world. Christian colleges including Northwestern College, need to accept the challenge to develop leaders in our society who will make an impact for Christ. Christian higher education in shaping thinking in the global village of the twenty-first century will need to look at our preparation of these potential leaders.



The Northwestern College student will need to see God's strength and rely upon it. We need to look at all members of society as worthwhile and dignified members of God's world.

Dwight L. Moody stated that it is when a person ceases to think what he can do and begins to think what God can do with the person, that things will begin to happen. If the Northwestern College student can see him/herself as clay in the potter's (God's) hands and that the college student need not be alone in a sea of anonymity that effective education can occur for those students who are considered the weaker vessels in the schools. The Northwestern College student needs to look at each of the students that require special education as part of the entire body, not being more or less important than any other member. Then cleansing and training can occur.

Words that Dr. Ted Ward spoke at a Northwestern College in-service in 1993 are appropriate. There must be a concerted institutional commitment in preparing the Northwestern College student to deal with the real world of work and thought. In order for that to occur, the college student needs to know his/her foundation and thought. There needs to be an emphasis on service and it must be integrated with excellence. Dr. Ward goes on to say that we need to learn to live together and rejoice in each other's gifts. The college needs to develop a transformational vision of fitting into society and community from school. There cannot be the view of power and maintaining the status quo after leaving Northwestern College but the student needs to be prepared to become an agent of change, to become transformational.

In order to serve effectively in the office or sphere of teacher, the Northwestern College student needs a well-rounded, whole educational experience. This whole

experience comes through a liberal arts program which then develops intellectual wholeness, physical wholeness, spiritual/moral wholeness, and social/emotional wholeness. Within this context of a body of knowledge, in conjunction with Northwestern College's emphasis on teaching the whole person and every person, the inclusion concept is instilled (Northwestern College Education Department Model).

From the perspective of the special education teacher, the teacher has to see the student, no matter what the level of functioning as one of God's creatures in need of community, in need of the care, concern, and love of the teacher. This student with special needs is viewed in the same light as any created human being. The goal is to serve students in the name of Jesus Christ with the expectation that they, too, will seek to offer themselves to Christian service as they go forth to reach others.

The teacher in the general classroom is going to view each and everyone of his/her students as ones who need acceptance. They need to be viewed with developing the person to full capacity in God's kingdom.

When one considers the proposed viewpoint of inclusion, the preservice special educator, the preservice general educator, and all students at Northwestern College would view each other as part of the community of the included. This would display itself in acceptance of all students. Popularity contests would not be in vogue. Each and every student would be valued for being a person first of all and then being valued and appreciated for the gifts God has given to him/her. These gifts would all be essential to the functioning of the body of believers and for the transformation of the society and the culture into which they will plunge after leaving Northwestern College. The viewpoint of the Northwestern College student of the community at large would be that of seeing the



world as God's created world and a setting where they as His servants wage battle against the forces of evil and strive to show the love of Christ to all peoples, those of varied colors, nationalities, abilities, and gender. The Northwestern College faculty would pursue their various spheres of expertise, pass them on to the student in such a way so that the student would see the relationship of the field of study to God's universe and see how they would use it for further glorifying God.

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